4 GOP Senators Seek Probe of Iran-Contra Prosecutor

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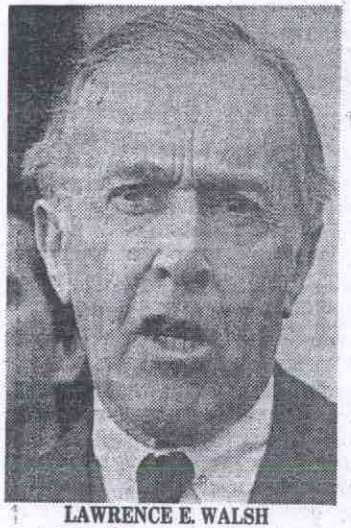

LAWRENCE E. WALSH
. . target of senators' letter to Barr

By George Lardner Jr.
Washington Post Staff Writer

A majority of the Republicans on the Senate Judiciary Committee have formally asked for appointment of an independent counsel to investigate whether independent counsel Lawrence E. Walsh's recent handling of the Iran-contra probe involved improper political considerations.

Four of the committee's six GOP senators asked Attorney General William P. Barr on Tuesday to initiate an independent investigation of Walsh's actions in securing an Oct. 30 indictment of former secretary of defense Caspar W. Weinberger.

Barr, who has expressed his dislike for the independent counsel law, has until Dec. 10 to respond. The law itself expires Dec. 15; efforts to renew it were killed in September by the threat of a GOP Senate filibuster.

GOP Sens. Alan K. Simpson (Wyo.), Strom Thurmond (S.C.), Hank Brown (Colo.) and Charles E. Grassley (Iowa) wrote Barr that they wanted an investigation to determine "whether there were any illegal, improper, or unethical activities" by Walsh's office in bringing the new Weinberger indictment four days before the presidential election.

The indictment accused Weinberger of lying to Congress in 1987 when questioned about the Iran-contra affair and included the text of a Jan. 7, 1986, note by Weinberger that contradicted President Bush's statements about his knowledge of arms-for-hostages dealings with Iran. The indictment replaced an earlier charge of obstructing Congress that Weinberger's lawyers had criticized as too wordy and redolent of a conspiracy case.

Some Republicans blame the timing of the new indictment for stalling Bush's drive to close the preelection gap in the polls with President-elect Clinton. They also have alleged that the Clinton-Gore campaign may have been tipped off to the indictment a day in advance, because Clinton's campaign aides seized on the disclosure in a press release issued two hours after the Oct. 30 indictment but dated—mistakenly according to campaign officials—Oct. 29.

Walsh spokesman Mary Belcher said "the timing of the reindictment was dictated by a tight trial schedule and had nothing to do with the political calendar. We are confident that any inquiry will show [Republican] concerns are groundless."